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MOLE

It began with a letter in the back seat of an American diplomat's car that said: "I am a Russian military officer."

BY WILLIAM HOOD

Contact men are assigned cover names. The man who walked into the Aragvi Restaurant on Gorki Street in Moscow in September 1959 was known as Daniel.

Menus were brought by a jovial waiter. When drinks were ordered, Daniel reached across the table for a piece of the warm peasant bread. His shirt cuff eased back over his wristwatch. It was 8:13. Excusing himself, Daniel walked slowly across the restaurant. It was exactly 8:15 when he walked into the men's room.

Max was already there, soaping his hands at a washbasin. Beneath the closed door of a toilet cabinet in the corner of the room, Daniel could see dark trousers crumpled over the heavy Russian shoes of a man seated on the toilet.

Stepping up to a washbasin, Daniel glanced into the mirror. Max's familiar face was gaunt, almost emaciated. His suit hung loosely from his body.

After a quick glance at the corner toilet, Max turned toward Daniel and put his finger to his lips. As Daniel bent over the washbowl and turned the faucet, Max touched his elbow. Facing Daniel, his back to the toilet, the Russian pointed to a slight bulge beneath his shirt. Then, lifting his hand to his ear, he made a circling motion with his index finger.

Daniel could guess the meaning—Max was wired, wearing a miniature radio transmitter taped beneath his shirt. Daniel nodded.

Max tugged at a bandage covering his left thumb. Twisting the bandage, Max pulled it off intact. Daniel could see a jagged cut, closed with crude black stitches. Strips of lined paper were wrapped around the middle of the wound.

Daniel watched as the Russian gingerly unwound the paper, his back still turned to the occupied toilet. Max handed the soiled paper to the contact man and forced the bandage back over his thumb. Then, with his hand close to his chest, he made a shooing motion toward Daniel.

Turning off the faucet in his basin, Daniel looked warily at the motionless feet in the toilet and handed Max a tightly wrapped package, about the size of a book of paper matches. With a resigned smile, the Russian slipped it into his pocket.

Daniel dried his hands, walked slowly up the stairs and across the restaurant to his table, the paper strips cached in an inside breast pocket of his suit. He had not glimpsed the message on the paper strips, but the men's room pantomime could only mean one thing: Max had been arrested and had come to the rendezvous under KGB control.

It was nearly midnight before Daniel could free himself from his three guests and return to his room. Then for almost an hour he studied the meticulously penciled message. When Daniel got up and walked across the room to a liquor cabinet, isolated phrases tumbled through his mind: "... they are treating me better now ... I tore these strips from the paper they gave me so I could write answers to some of the questions in my cell ... I made each the same width so they would not notice ... They have stopped beating me now ... please try to do something for my family ... I managed to gash my finger in the cell ... even General Gribanov was at one interrogation, sitting behind me ... whatever happens do not break contact ... If my plan works they will let me go abroad again as a double agent ... if not, my only

hope is that your president will intercede with Khrushchev for me ... disregard all reports I send, they are writing the messages ... do what you can for my family. ..."

Daniel poured himself a drink and walked back to the desk. He remembered the first time he had heard of Max. He wished they could have shaken hands a last time.

The story that ended in the men's room of the Moscow restaurant began seven years earlier, in Vienna, capital of occupied Austria, when an American diplomat found an envelope, addressed in faulty German to the U.S. high commissioner, in the back seat of his automobile. Inside the envelope was a letter in Russian that opened with the words: "I am a Russian officer. ..." It offered to sell information on the organization of a Soviet armored division, proposing a time and place for meeting on a street corner in downtown Vienna. A Central Intelligence Agency agent kept the appointment and took the man he met there to a "safe house" for a preliminary interview. American intelligence officials decided that the Russian probably was, as he claimed, a Soviet military officer and, because he wore civilian clothes, almost certainly an intelligence officer. Believing correctly that they had a "big fish" on the line, they rushed a senior Russian-speaking case officer from Washington to meet with the Soviet officer at a second appointment. The American is called Gregory Domnin in this account; by the terms under which Mole was published his true name cannot be given. When the Soviet officer appeared at the safe house for the second meeting, Domnin was waiting.

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